

United State Marine Corps
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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

ASSESSING THE TOTALITARIAN ISLAMISTS:
A STRATEGY OF ALLIANCES

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

by

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AY 07-08

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Date: 17 April 2008

Report Documentation Page

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

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|--|------------------------------------|---|---|--|----------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|--|
| 1. REPORT DATE 2008 | 2. REPORT TYPE | 3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2008 to 00-00-2008 | | | | | | |
| 4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Assessing the Totalitarian Islamists: A Strategy of Alliances | | | 5a. CONTRACT NUMBER | | | | | |
| | | | 5b. GRANT NUMBER | | | | | |
| | | | 5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER | | | | | |
| 6. AUTHOR(S) | | | 5d. PROJECT NUMBER | | | | | |
| | | | 5e. TASK NUMBER | | | | | |
| | | | 5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER | | | | | |
| 7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) United States Marine Corps,Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University,2076 South Street, Marine Corps Combat Development Command,Quantico,VA,22134-5068 | | | 8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER | | | | | |
| 9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) | | | 10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S) | | | | | |
| | | | 11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S) | | | | | |
| 12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited | | | | | | | | |
| 13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES | | | | | | | | |
| 14. ABSTRACT | | | | | | | | |
| 15. SUBJECT TERMS | | | | | | | | |
| 16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF: | | | 17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR) | | 18. NUMBER OF PAGES 36 | | 19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON | |
| a. REPORT unclassified | b. ABSTRACT unclassified | c. THIS PAGE unclassified | | | | | | |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: Assessing the Totalitarian Islamists: A Strategy of Alliances

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Thesis: Totalitarian Islamist Groups have determined that the US's center of gravity is the international political will of allied nations, and have created a strategy to attack it.

Discussion: The 2004 bombings in Madrid, Spain marked a milestone in totalitarian Islamist strategy for attacking US-led coalitions in Afghanistan and Iraq. This attack, which occurred days before a pivotal election between parties for and against participation in the Iraq operation, resulted in a surprising victory for the anti-Iraq party and a hasty departure of Spanish forces. This single incident additionally sparked the withdrawal of military forces from a further three countries. This strategy of breaking US-led coalitions does more than remove allied military forces; it attacks directly at the US's center of gravity in foreign operations, international political will.

The success of this operation, and its effects on the cohesiveness of US-led coalitions against totalitarian Islamists, was a serious blow to the moral legitimacy of US foreign policy. The Madrid bombings and other examples of threats and coercions of US allies calls into question the strategic value the U.S. places on coalition maintenance. Although the totalitarian Islamists have found success in their strategy of weakening US-led coalitions, their efforts have been equally unsuccessful in breaking allied will. This however does not avoid the fact that the U.S. needs to reevaluate the priority it puts on maintaining its coalitions, and thus its international moral legitimacy, in foreign military operations.

Conclusion: Totalitarian Islamist Groups have enjoyed mixed success in removing US-allies from operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

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PREFACE

The impetus for this paper started well before my attendance at Marine Command and Staff College. As a Department of Defense officer charged with maintaining international relations, as I watched the events following the 2004 Madrid bombings unfold, I quickly realized that the totalitarian Islamists had reached a new level of sophistication in their global war against the U.S. At that time, I had believed like many others that Al Qaida was uniquely behind the attacks. However, in the course of my research I came to understand that the chain of responsibility for the Madrid bombings, and the other incidents of threats causing allied withdrawal from Afghanistan and Iraq, is not as clear as that of the September 11 attacks in the U.S.

Al Qaida is developing, learning, and adapting to the new international paradigm it faces. It no longer needs to centrally plan out and finance every operation, only needing to "let a contract" over the publicly accessible internet to its ideological adherents around the globe. In order to defend against this strategy, the U.S. needs to put significant effort into building a strategy of coalition maintenance and building, not only to stymie the loss of allies but to enlist future partners in the war against totalitarian Islam.

ASSESSING THE TOTALITARIAN ISLAMISTS: A STRATEGY OF ALLIANCES

"A coalition of the willing is more like a summer romance, an intense but fleeting attachment, without any fundamental commitment, beginning with the best of behavior but deteriorating over time, and not infrequently ending in heartbreak."

- Dr. Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall, Adjunct Senior Fellow for Alliance Relations at the Council on Foreign Relations

On a warm spring day in March 2004, a series of deadly bombs rocked the Madrid train system, killing almost two hundred Spaniards and offering a brutal reminder that no country is safe from acts of terrorism. Following this attack, and a befuddled attempt by the Spanish government to place blame on the indigenous ETA terrorist group, Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero and his Socialist party easily rode to victory on a campaign promise to bring home Spain's roughly 1,300 troops in Iraq. In the following months, Zapatero came through on his pledge, and Spanish troops exited Iraq in spite of widespread condemnation of appeasement to terror groups.

These events demonstrate one example of a disconcerting trend in global politics where countries initially willing to fight on the side of U.S. against terror groups and despotic dictators have offered combat forces, only to remove them under threat or duress. The withdrawal of Spanish forces was much more than a tactical victory for the totalitarian Islamists,¹ as it demonstrated the fragility of the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq and the ability of enemy forces to target this weakness. However, are the totalitarian Islamists seeing success in this tactic? This paper contends that the totalitarian Islamists are seeing partial success with this tactic, in that the 3/11 attacks were part of a loosely linked series of operations designed to target the center of gravity of U.S. policy in Iraq and Afghanistan--international support for, and thus legitimacy in, those operations.

By utilizing center of gravity analysis and other historical military strategy and philosophy, this paper initially assesses whether or not international alliances are a critical component of U.S. foreign policy. This paper then examines successful examples where totalitarian Islamists intended to inspire or induce, specifically or circumstantially, premature allied troop withdrawals in Operations ENDURING (OEF) and IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF). This analysis will contrast the enemy threat with the domestic political and military situation in each country, as well as examine secondary effects these withdrawals had on partner nations. The synthesis of the historical military philosophy on alliances, taken in conjunction with the case studies, will allow for recommendations on how best U.S. policymakers should confront the totalitarian Islamist's strategy of breaking the U.S.'s international coalitions. In the aggregate, it is hypothesized that although each situation was largely independent from the others, the threat itself was not unilaterally capable of guaranteeing the withdrawal of foreign forces. The threat was, however, a trigger that pushed allied countries just enough to encourage a domestic reexamination of their positions as participants in OEF and OIF, as well as in international alliances with the U.S.

WHY TARGET ALLIANCES?

Following U.S.-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the concept that totalitarian Islamists would target an enemy coalition should not have taken many by surprise. This strategy of waging conflicts via the battlespace of popular opinion, now dubbed the *human terrain*, is hardly a recent phenomenon. Judging by the almost complete unpreparedness of the U.S. and its allies to counter this esoteric threat, it seems Western military and political leaders failed to fully conceptualize the simplistic maxims of military thought as put forth by philosophers-soldier Carl

von Clausewitz and Sun Tzu. These widely adhered-to strategists have all placed an enemy's alliances as a key target for physical and psychological attack. The loss of an ally and the withdrawal of his army have a compound effect of being both a moral and physical blow to a coalition, especially in the era of global news networks and the internet. The basis for this as a weakness on current U.S. foreign policy, however, stems from the idea that global alliances are essential to the war on totalitarian Islamist groups.

Clausewitz and the Importance of Political Will

The idea of a center of gravity (CoG) in a military endeavor is rooted in the writings of Prussian military strategist Carl von Clausewitz. In his U.S. Army War College (USAWC) monograph, LTC Antulio Echevarria II (Ph.D.), a prolific writer on von Clausewitz and military strategy, asserts that the Clausewitzian CoG is not a source of physical strength, as widely believed within current U.S. military theory, but a factor of power. LTC Echevarria continues that the concept of CoG is only applicable in determining the "unity" or "interdependence" of an enemy as a cohesive fighting force.² Regarding CoG analysis in the war on Al Qaeda, LtCol James Reilly conducted in-depth analysis of what he perceived to be the U.S.'s CoG. LtCol Reilly concludes in his USAWC thesis that the friendly--U.S. and coalition--CoG was the "will of the international coalition," adding that without international buy-in the war on Al Qaeda will not succeed.³ Although some military strategists argue that "political will" cannot be a CoG, one cannot overlook the vital importance of alliances as discussed in U.S. President George W. Bush's 2002 National Security Strategy. Interwoven throughout, President Bush specifically addresses this importance, dedicating entire sections to strengthening alliances, working with regional partners and safeguarding allies against terrorist networks.⁴

This linkage between the friendly CoG and a political, vice military, source of power is not just relegated to a CoG analysis of the current war on totalitarian Islam. According to Clausewitz, war is simply an outcropping of the political objective, the *original motive*. War, according to Clausewitz, is inextricably linked to, and rooted in, political aims, without which war is a means unto itself without a supported end. In that same vein, without the political will to conduct and sustain war, the war effort will fail.⁵ When taken together, the assessments presented suggest that the cohesiveness of political will is necessary for success in *any* war, and that subsequently in the current struggle the international political will is equally, if not more, important than the purely domestic.

Sun Tzu and the Strategy of Attacking Alliances

Although much more amorphous and dated than Clausewitz, Sun Tzu's theories on enemy alliances are just as relevant. In his seminal work *The Art of War*--written over two thousand years before Clausewitz--Sun Tzu envisions conflict through a more holistic lens, attributing actions taken on the periphery of the battlefield equally vital as to those on it. Being greatly outmatched numerically, technologically, and financially, the idea of weakening an enemy through an indirect manner, i.e. without direct confrontation, must appeal greatly to the totalitarian Islamists. This strategy, allowing for relative combat effectiveness much greater than numbers of men or technology would attribute, was aptly dubbed by Sun Tzu as the pinnacle of military achievement or, "the acme of skill."⁶

In terms of the stratification of military priorities, Sun Tzu argues that targeting the enemy's strategy is "of *supreme* importance," and, therefore, should be the ultimate focus for military commanders. In his stratification of actions in war, Sun Tzu does not see combat as the second best option, but, "disrupting his alliances" as the next best preference to attacking his

strategy. Only after these two choices are exhausted does Sun Tzu say that attacking the enemy is allowed.⁷ Taken in conjunction with the great importance placed on coalition building in the 2002 U.S. NSS, the protection and maintenance of broad international support is doubly critical in that--according to Sun Tzu--since the U.S.'s strategy is hinged on coalition support, you attack his strategy by attacking his coalitions.

The Enemy's View on Attacking Alliances

Heretofore this paper has argued that yes, broad international support for the struggle against totalitarian Islam is vital, but has the enemy realized this, thus precipitating actions to counter this vulnerability. As future examples will show, the answer is unequivocally "yes." The totalitarian Islamists, in this case Al Qaeda proper, have publicly declared their intention to break the U.S.-led alliances in Iraq and Afghanistan. In a series of public statements since October 2001, Al Qaeda has specifically warned U.S. allies Britain, Australia, Germany, France, Poland, Japan and Spain against participating in OEF and OIF. In each statement, the message remains the same; threats of retribution are joined with arguments that the allies were led into an unjust and immoral war by duplicitous domestic leadership at the behest of an evil U.S. In addition to highlighting U.S. atrocities in its "unjust wars" in Afghanistan and Iraq, each cleverly spun message leaves out any unpalatable undertones that would resonate poorly within moderate societies. Themes such as a global Islamic caliphate, fundamental to most Al Qaeda statements, are eschewed for a seemingly benevolent and well-intentioned proposal of an Al Qaeda truce, in exchange for an allied refusal to participate in wars against Muslims.⁸ These statements strongly suggest the totalitarian Islamists also believe the "international political will" is a, if not only, coalition CoG and place strategic value on targeting and manipulating it.

TOTALITARIAN ISLAMIST INFLUENCE ON COALITION PARTNERS

The following studies paint a stark picture of the influence and impact actions by the totalitarian Islamists have had on U.S.-led coalition members. In each instance the partner's decisions to leave was manipulated, either directly or indirectly, by a pre-meditated action taken by a totalitarian Islamist group. These case studies do not represent all coalition members who have withdrawn from the OEF and OIF operations, but demonstrate the efficacy of enemy efforts to break international cohesiveness in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Spain

The attack on the Spanish train system on 11 March 2004 (3/11) should not be remembered solely for their physical destruction, almost 200 innocent lives lost in an act of wanton destruction, but for the political chain reaction it set off. This series of events culminated in an outcome that likely far surpassed the best case scenario of the totalitarian Islamists, not only was the Spanish conservative People's Party (PP) ousted, but the victorious Socialist Worker's Party (PSOE) followed through on their campaign promise and immediately redeployed Spanish forces from Iraq. Up to that point Spain, under President Josa Maria Aznar, had been a strong supporter of the invasion, having lead the European charge for support to OIF by spearheading the so-called "letter of eight," an open letter from eight leading European heads of government demonizing the Saddam Hussein regime.⁹ However, following the political change, the U.S. was dealt its most severe blow to the international legitimacy of operations in Iraq. Some may argue that without direct communication between the totalitarian Islamists--in this case Al Qaeda--and the perpetrators, one cannot create a causal relationship, however, the evidence suggests otherwise.

The series of events leading up to the removal of Spanish forces began well before the 3/11 attacks, and to that end, well before the invasion of Iraq. Granted, the PP greatly exacerbated their demise through political mishandling in the wake of the bombing, but according to multiple independent sources, the terrorists carried out their actions with the strict intention of achieving an attack on a strong U.S. ally and on the legitimacy of OIF. During the three year investigation by Spanish authorities into the 3/11 attacks no orders, financing or material were found to have been received from Al Qaeda, however, the most important aspects of the bombing, the associations of suspected members and root ideology, is much more closely tied. That said, the inability of Spanish authorities to comprehensively link the totalitarian Islamists to the 3/11 attackers is likely by little fault of their own, as three of the operational planners, Jamal Zougam, Serhane Fakhet and Jamal Ahmidan committed suicide days after the attack when confronted by Spanish police.¹⁰ Had Spanish authorities been able to interview these men, there would likely be much greater insight into links between the 3/11 attackers and a direct Al Qaeda plot to bring down the PP.

Connecting the 3/11 attacker to Al Qaeda follows two paths, links between personalities, and anecdotal evidence between an Al Qaeda threat and an internet postings that exactly eerily resembles the 3/11 operation. In terms of links to Al Qaeda, two brothers involved in the attacks, Abdelazzi and Salheddin Benyaich had a brother killed with Al Qaeda forces in Afghanistan. Of the three who committed suicide, Zougam, was linked to cleric Mohammed al-Fazizi, an Imam at the Hamburg mosque that produced the September 2001 (9/11) attackers, as well as to Frenchman David Courtailler, a know associate of Zacharias Moussaoui; and Fakhet was reported to have sought Al Qaeda support in Turkey in 2002.¹¹ In addition to those directly involved in the Madrid attacks, two men know to have associated with the 3/11 attackers, Imad

Yarkas and Amer Azizi, were both charged in Spanish courts following 9/11 for having supported the ringleader and planner of those attacks, Mohammed Atta and Ramzi Binalshibh.¹²

It is assessed that the ideological basis for attacking Spain derived from two different sources. The first antecedent was an October 2003 audio message by Osama Bin Laden threatening Spain, among other OIF supporting nations, with attacks should it participate in the “unjust” operation.¹³ The second, and most alarming, was an internet posting discovered in November 2003, allegedly written by then head of Al Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, that carefully analyzed the domestic political situation in a number of coalition states with a view to identifying the most vulnerable. The document dedicated six pages to Spain, described as Washington's closest European ally except Britain, and underlined the extent of popular opposition to the government's support for the war in Iraq. The text also noted that Zapatero had promised to withdraw Spanish troops should he win the next general election in March 2004, identifying Spain as the weakest link in the coalition and insinuating that if the Aznar government failed to survive a major terrorist coup, its successor would bring Spain's presence in Iraq to an end. The end goal of this internet plan prognosticated a “victory of the Socialist party and the withdrawal of Spanish forces [from Iraq].”¹⁴

Although these two ideological links specifically called for attacks on Spain, Spanish prosecution was never able to link direct funding and/or communication to either Al Qaeda's inner circle or local franchises such as Abu Hafs al-Masri Brigade or the Moroccan Islamic Combat Group.¹⁵ All evidence points to a semi-independently planned plot by disaffected and downtrodden North African immigrants, most of who dealt drugs to finance the attacks, who became radicalized by what they perceived as a hostile and anti-Muslim Spanish government and legal system.¹⁶ This signifies a departure from a top-down form of operational planning, ala

9/11, with one that most resembles a “letting of a contracts” of sorts to any groups or persons willing to autonomously undertake operations without direct guidance. This lack of direct interaction, though, makes the totalitarian Islamists no less culpable for the 3/11 attacks, and resulted in no less a cry of “giving in” to terrorism when it occurred.

When the initial shock of the Spanish elections reached the other side of the Atlantic, the feeling was almost universal; the voters had buckled under the threat of terrorism. Well-known foreign policy expert Thomas Freidman hinted at a second Munich Pact, dubbing the elections as an “Axis of Appeasement.”¹⁷ Mere days after the Spanish election, U.S. President Bush, fearing a domino effect throughout the Iraqi coalition, in a meeting with the Dutch foreign minister, asked the Dutch people--and by extension other Europeans--to think hard before they followed any impulse to pull their troops out of Iraq.¹⁸ Yes, the PP added greatly to its demise by initially placing blame on the domestic terrorist organization ETA and bungling the subsequent investigation, however, the PP’s loss at the polls would have likely not happened--considering they had a 4-5% lead in the polls coming into the elections--had their loss not been selectively and specifically hastened by the 3/11 attack.¹⁹ In the end, the Iraq coalition not only lost a Spanish ally, but in the political fall-out three other nations also took the opportunity to remove their forces from Iraq.

The Dominican Republic and Honduras

Shortly after Spain decided to withdraw its support for operations in Iraq, two of the three remaining members of the Spanish-led *Plus Ultra* brigade followed Spain’s lead and took immediate steps to bring their troops home. What had been a significant political and military success, in that the U.S. gained support from hemispherical partners outside of traditional European allies, turned into a setback in U.S.-Central American relations. Not only did the

departure signal weak public support for the mission, but it also demonstrated that without the resources and leadership of a large Spanish-speaking lead force, smaller Latin American nations likely lacked the political will for overseas military operations.

Although the Spanish withdrawal precipitated that of The DR and Honduras, the deployment of 302 Dominican troops was likely from the outset too substantial a political and military burden on the DR. As early as March 2003, fissures in the pro-deployment administration's office were being highlighted by the Dominican media. When the Dominican Foreign Minister contradicted his President's stance on deployment, he did not qualify anti-Iraq comments as his "personal opinion" until much later.²⁰

In opposition to the wavering support in the DR, troop commitment in Honduras was much less fractious. The Honduran President was very supportive of the mission, and a majority, albeit slim, of its congress voted to approve the 370 member deployment.²¹ That said, as neighboring Nicaragua, and then The DR, removed their forces, President Ricardo Maduro, with support from the defense and foreign ministries and National Congress, followed suit and ordered the Honduran battalion home.²² In what was the first of its kind, the deployment of Central American forces in support of U.S. operations, only El Salvador remains to this day, The DR and Honduras exiting with the Spanish, and Nicaragua having already left.²³

Thailand

Thailand's force of 440 troops, originally intended to conduct a humanitarian mission and duly comprised of a mix of engineers, medical teams and a small scout platoon, arrived in Iraq in August 2003. Although initial public opposition seemed light, by late-2003, doubts at the uppermost levels of the Thai national security structure were beginning to show. Regarding the deteriorating security situation, Thai Foreign Minister Surakiart Sathirathai in December stated

that, "At this time we are able to function like every other country [in Iraq] but if the situation worsens and our troops cannot perform their duties then I will consult with the prime minister."²⁴ Following the 3/11 attacks, however, political will quickly eroded. In April, the Thai senate introduced a motion to immediately withdraw its troops from Iraq, specifically citing the Madrid bombings and a fear of similar attacks from its Muslim minority.²⁵ Although the motion to redeploy Thai forces was narrowly defeated, Thai Prime Minister Thaksin was forced to make a nearly impossible concession that Thai troops would be "immediately withdrawn" if attacked.²⁶ Immediately following this public display of weakness, Thai editorials responded with overwhelmingly negative press that demonized the operation and condemned the government of being a US-UK puppet.²⁷ Specific pleas from UN Secretary General Kofi Annan requesting a Thai extension through the Iraqi elections could not stop the demise of the mission. Facing a contentious presidential election, PM Thaksin simply allowed the unpopular mandate to expire.²⁸ Although initial expectations of a non-violent mission weakened Thai resolve, 3/11 and the fear of a similar attack provided the final impetus to withdraw from the Iraq operation.

The Philippines

The Philippine redeployment presents another, and unfortunately very effective, catalyst to coalition member's withdrawal, hostage taking. Although the US conducted a brutal counterinsurgency following its occupation of the Philippine islands at the start of the twentieth century, The Philippines and the U.S. have stood shoulder-to-shoulder against Communism initially, and later global terrorism. Even with such a staunch history of regional cooperation and mutual support, the taking of one hostage precipitated the seemingly easy removal of Philippine forces from OIF.

Events in 2004 exemplified the power of global media and communications when a totalitarian Islamist group, not known to be affiliated with Al Qaeda, was able to secure the removal of Philippine forces from Iraq. Pundits initially pondered how one of 1.3 million Filipinos working in the Middle East, Angelo de la Cruz, could be of such significance to the Filipino regime to warrant a public break with the U.S., who had 2,000 troops in harm's way in the Philippines battling the Al Qaeda-linked Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).²⁹ The answer lies not in a well-planned strategic operation by central Al Qaeda, but much like in Spain, an autonomous and likely independent action by some amorphous Iraqi insurgent group, able to manipulate the political will of a far-distant nation.

The presidency of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in the months prior to the capitulation had been tenuous at best. She had won by only a 3.5 percent (%) margin, and then only after seven weeks of judicial debate on the validity of the elections. De la Cruz may have been only one of 1.3 million Filipinos working in the Middle East, but was also one of 10 million working overseas, many of who remain voting constituents--10 percent (%) of total Philippine voting populace--in their homeland. Remittances from these workers also constitute one-tenth of the Filipino economy. These factors elevated de la Cruz to a symbol of the "everyman" within the economically depressed Filipino underclass, making it all but impossible for the government not to give in to the hostage taker's demands.³⁰ The Filipino withdrawal, following immediately that of Spain, Thailand and others, was a strong blow to what was likely perceived by U.S. policy-makers to be an exchange of Filipino support in Iraq for U.S. support on the islands. Although Washington viscerally objected to the decision, recalling its ambassador, the Philippine Senate majority leader made no effort to conceal the vital political necessity of the decision by confronting U.S. displeasure with the American adage that "all politics is local."³¹

The Republic of Korea

Heretofore, this paper has cited examples of nations leaving the OIF coalition, as such, the Republic of Korea (ROK) is currently the only ally to leave the OEF coalition under duress linked to a totalitarian Islamist group. In an effort to win the release of 21 Christian missionaries held hostage by Taliban-linked forces, the ROK not only agreed to withdraw their forces, but it is widely and credibly reported that they in addition paid a ransom of 20 million USD.³² Although there was little public discourse on the proposed course of action with the hostage takers, there was significant public reaction to the governmental response. This episode captured national attention in Korea and brought the debate over Korea's new Christian identity and the merits of missionary work to the forefront of public discussion. Initially, the ROK government's (ROKG) actions appeared to be popular for anti-American ROK President President Roh Moo-hyun, as the ROK press mostly praised the ROKG's efforts to ensure a peaceful end to the standoff.³³ That said, as the ROKG overestimated the need for a peaceful solution and underestimated Korean cultural necessity to "save face," public reaction quickly turned, especially once reports of a ransom were brought to light.³⁴

The withdrawal of a mere 195 medics and engineers was not a significant military blow to the Afghan coalition, however, considering the substantial U.S. commitment to ROK security, the withdrawal of ROK forces struck at the core of US-ROK relations. Adding insult to the situation, the Taliban even want so far as to brag that they planned to use the ransom money to "purchase arms, get our communication network renewed and buy vehicles for carrying out more suicide attacks."³⁵ Ironically, the political fall-out from the decision by President Roh was likely a contributing factor in his party's loss to pro-U.S. Lee Myung-bak, possibly resulting in greater ROK support to U.S. foreign policy against the totalitarian Islamists.

EVALUATION OF THE ENEMY'S STRATEGY

Taking into consideration only the examples presented previously, one would likely come to the conclusion that the totalitarian Islamists are highly successful in their attempts to break the U.S.-led coalitions in Afghanistan and Iraq. That is simply not the case. Although this paper argues that at least six countries were induced or inspired to withdraw forces from Afghanistan and Iraq due to specific actions taken by the totalitarian Islamists, a greater number have been victims of similar tactics, yet have persevered in the coalitions.

An analysis of those countries with military forces participating in OEF and OIF that have suffered bombing attacks and hostage situations at the hands of totalitarian Islamist groups presents helpful contrast to the pessimistic view painted previously. Of the twenty-five nations currently participating in OIF, ten have had hostage situations and two--the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia--have been the victims of bombing attacks.³⁶ Within those participating in OEF, of the forty nations with combat forces in Afghanistan eight have had hostage situations and the same two--UK and Australia--were victims of bomb attacks.³⁷ These statistics aside, one could argue that those nations that continue in OIF with significantly reduced participation--Czech Republic, Denmark, Poland, and Ukraine--were influenced by their hostage ordeals, but the author has found little empirical evidence to support such a theory. At least in the Ukrainian example the decision is assessed to have been taken entirely to please a domestic audience during an election period.³⁸ The continuing problem, though, is that since threats do seem to result in coalition abandonment, even in a minority of cases, the totalitarian Islamists will likely continue the aforementioned tactics. An example of this is being played out currently, in that an

Al Qaeda-linked group in Saharan Africa is demanding Austria withdrawal from the OEF coalition in exchange for the release of two hostage tourists.³⁹

The impact of the action perpetrated by the totalitarian Islamists cannot be judged from a universal perspective and must be assessed on a case-by-case basis. From the examples cited in this paper, only the Spanish, Philippine and South Korean situations can be directly linked to precursor demands of a withdrawal under threat of a certain action, and to that end the Spanish example carried only loose linkages between a specific demand and the terrorist action. In the case of the Dominican Republic, Honduras, and Thailand the withdrawal was a secondary, and likely unintended, outcome. This is not to say that an initial perception of a low level of violence, only to be confronted with the opposite, was not a factor in the decision by a further ten countries to leave the OIF coalition (South Korean being the only nation to leave the OEF coalition), but that the decision by these former coalition partners⁴⁰ was not affected by a specific action by a totalitarian Islamist group to precipitate a withdrawal. Needless to say, though, the loss of even one coalition member due to an enemy threat--whether it is a hostage or bombing situation--is a significant blow to the moral legitimacy of the coalition. Adding to that, the requirement for U.S. forces, already stretched thin in Iraq and Afghanistan, to make up for the physical loss of a coalition partner is similarly damaging to U.S. domestic political will and finite military resources.

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

If taken at face value, in that the CoG of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq is the “international will” to continue those operations, the U.S. and remaining coalition partners need to re-evaluate the current strategy on maintaining current coalition membership. In addition,

noting the continuing requirement for substantial troop levels in OEF and OIF, these coalitions need to create a new strategy of bringing yet unparticipating nations into the effort. This requirement should not be seen as one of many options for success against the totalitarian Islamists, but the most important factor in defeating the enemy and bringing a semblance of self-rule to Afghanistan and Iraq.

In her seminal work, in which she argues that multi-lateral foreign policy is vital to national security, Dr. Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall outlines a series of factors critical to maintaining and building future alliances. Dr. Sherwood-Randall cites shared recognition of common threats, sustained engagement and investment in peacetime interaction, interoperable military capabilities, and continuous consultations that set expectations for allied behavior. Additionally, Dr. Sherwood-Randall advocates for utilizing all aspects of U.S. influence--not just military--to complement alliance membership, noting that alliance membership must at its root be in the self-interest of all partners. Utilizing these aspects of alliance maintenance and construction, and taking into consideration the examples of coalition partners that have been swayed due to actions by totalitarian Islamists, the following should be advocated to mitigate future coalition withdrawals as part of a--as Dr. Sherwood-Randall describes--U.S. *strategy of alliances.*⁴¹

Increased Senior Defense Representation

Currently, only a handful of Department of Defense (DoD) personnel are permanently assigned in foreign countries to Defense Attaché and military group (milgroup) staffs. Likewise, the primary mission of the attaché personnel is not military relations, but intelligence gathering. Furthermore, the highest rank of any Defense Attaché outside of China, France, Russia, and the UK is Colonel or Navy Captain.⁴² In other instances, the chief of the milgroup outranks the

attaché, thus muddying the authorities and responsibilities of each. This lack of permanently assigned senior DoD personnel dedicated to facilitating bi-lateral relationships technically leaves senior political-military interaction *in the host nation* to officers of the Department of State's (DoS) Assistant Secretariat of Political-Military Affairs. Although the DoS works admirably at this function, its mainly career civilian personnel lack both expertise in military affairs and are understaffed as a result of the conflict in Iraq.⁴³ To that end, the U.S. military needs to greatly increase the level of continuous participation it has with alliance and coalition partners. To satisfy this requirement, retired flag officers, as well as experienced civilian policy experts, should be allowed to act, unencumbered by a strict intelligence collection mission, as the senior DoD representation in foreign countries. This direct link to the DoD, much like the Director of National Intelligence's embassy-based Chiefs of Station, would allow for a freer flow of communication, and the more senior rank would promote an idea that the U.S. places greater importance in its international partnerships.

Setting Realistic Coalition Expectations

It is only through either arrogance or ignorance that the U.S. would fail to recognize that all sovereign nations act in their own best interest. Objective public opinion polls and in-country assessments by the Intelligence Community and the DoS are vital in determining public opinion towards U.S. foreign policy. This is even more important in democracies, where a loss by one political group, or populous pandering during an election campaign, can result in weak coalition resolve. Should the decision be made to receive military support in the form of combat forces, the U.S. needs to ensure that allied military forces are up to the task, even if there is initially strong domestic political support for such operations. A unit lacking basic support functions cannot be left on its own against a dangerous enemy, as this situation only precipitates a loss of

national face and a significant motivation for an ally to leave. An ally who arrives into the theater of operations without enough resources for autonomous operation, or one with significant national caveats, should still be welcomed, but kept on the sidelines or in a supporting function. Although a nation may desire a combat force contribution, if assessed this could be a precursor to a withdrawal should that force encounter loss of life, the U.S. should refine the request to elements capable of conducting a supporting functions, such as airlift, intelligence/surveillance /reconnaissance or training host nation military forces.

Handling Dedicated and Wavering Partners

There is no panacea to the dilemma of how to subtly and delicately dictate support to an allied contribution, although, an ally that remains committed to the mission needs to be rewarded. As indicated by the committed support from Georgia and El Salvador (see appendix) to the Iraq mission, a consistent ally should receive U.S. gratis for their efforts. This support should be in the form of U.S. training and equipment, along with other U.S. perquisites on the diplomatic and economic fronts. American leaders must also realize that public diplomacy is paramount and comments deemed trivial in the U.S. can have effects on coalition resolve. Then U.S. Secretary of State Powell's words of praise to El Salvador likely cemented their allegiance; however Secretary of Defense Robert Gates' December 2007 criticism of NATO units in southern Afghanistan--The Netherlands, Canada, and Britain--caused a significant rift in the alliance and may be enough ammunition for the Dutch parliament to vote down future force contributions.⁴⁴ Once allies understand that tangible benefits result from their participation, and that they are appreciated for their sacrifice, they would be more likely to weather future storms, attributing their dedication to stronger U.S. ties. In contrast though, allies that demonstrate a lack of resolve should not be punished, as the democratic process is a complicated one, but

likewise should not be courted with benefits outweighing those given to dedicated allies. In addition, no nation should be rewarded for giving ultimatums to the U.S. for greater participation; this only leads to a policy of political blackmail.

CONCLUSION

The strategy of breaking the U.S.-led alliances in Afghanistan and Iraq is a paramount threat to the ongoing operations against totalitarian Islamist groups. Without these international alliances the U.S. stands at best a significantly reduced chance of preventing this enemy from impacting the formation of sustainable democracies in Afghanistan and Iraq, and increases the risk from these elements of further terrorist attacks on the U.S. homeland. The piecemeal partitioning of international coalitions will create a “death by a thousand paper cuts” scenario if left unchecked. As seen in the cases cited, the threat of alliance withdrawals due to actions by the totalitarian Islamists is both strategically sound and a proven method for attacking the U.S.’s moral legitimacy in its foreign policy. This strategy is not without fault, however, as many nations have persevered in the face of similar threats.

The U.S. must take substantial steps to prevent current partners from leaving coalition efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as build new relationships. The gain of a temporary ally is not worth the physical and moral blow of their unexpected departure. Even more importantly, it has been demonstrated that the departure of even one key ally--such as Spain--can cause secondary effects among other allies. In an effort to shore up this weakened pillar of U.S. foreign policy, the U.S. needs to implement a strategy aimed at increasing the quantity and quality of political-military interaction with partner countries, set more realistic expectations of what all parties desire out of coalitions and alliances, and handle relationships with both

dedicated and wavering partners in a more sophisticated manner. This is not to say that offers of support should be denied outright, any nation willing to fight alongside the U.S. is deserving of our utmost respect, but that all sides need to realize that the current threat from totalitarian Islam impacts all freedom-loving nations of the world, and the loss of even one ally is hugely detrimental to the cause.

The U.S. must realize that although it remains the world's only superpower, its influence has been reduced on the global stage. No longer do allies blindly back U.S. foreign policy. The U.S. needs to reinvent its global image, or risk further alienation when rallying international support to confront future enemies. This paradigm shift needs to take precedence over all other foreign policy efforts, as without global support against future problems, such as Iranian and North Korean nuclearization, the U.S. will end up standing alone and ultimately fail in efforts to stymie these threats. Consider as an example that in Operation DESERT STORM, 13 Muslim nations--totaling almost 150,000 combat forces--contributed to the effort against Saddam.⁴⁵ However, in OIF, only two majority Muslim nations, Albania and Azerbaijan with 120 and 150 troops respectively, participate with forces in Iraq.⁴⁶ This simple analysis provides proof positive that the U.S. needs to rethink how it interacts with and its allies and endeavor towards a strategy of alliances, or risk failure against the totalitarian Islamists.

Notes

¹ The term "totalitarian Islamists" was conceived by Dr. Douglas E. Streusand, faculty at the Marine Command and Staff College. It is used to denote the aggregate of Islamic elements violently opposed to U.S. foreign policy. As stated, this group specifically includes Al Qaeda and the Taliban, but also other groups not specifically aligned with Al Qaeda, but still largely inspired by a similar ideology that is against Jewish, Christian and moderate Islamic governance.

² LTC Antulio J. Echevarria II, "Clausewitz's Center of Gravity: Changing Our Warfighting Doctrine-Again!," Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, September 2002, vi.

³ LtCol James Reilly, "A Strategic Level Center of Gravity Analysis on the Global War on Terrorism," U.S. Army War College, 09 April 2002, 32.

⁴ George W. Bush, The National Security Strategy of the United States, 17 September 2002 <www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html> (10 December 2007).

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⁶ Sun Tzu, The Art of War, trans. Samuel B. Griffith, (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 1963), 77. Hereafter cited as Art of War.

⁷ Art of War, 78.

⁸ "Text of Interview Held with al-Qa'ida Leader Usama Bin Laden," DNI Open Source Center, 21 January 2003, <www.opensource.gov> (19 March 2008), "Al-Jazirah Carries Bin Laden's Audio Message to Iraqis and Americans," DNI Open Source Center, 18 October 2003, <www.opensource.gov> (19 March 2008), "Bin Laden Threatens Revenge on Israel, US, Offers Truce With Europeans," DNI Open Source Center, 15 April 2004 <www.opensource.gov> (09 December 2007), and "Bin Laden's Message to Europeans on War in Afghanistan," DNI Open Source Center, 30 November 2007, <www.opensource.gov> (19 December 2007).

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¹⁷ Thomas L. Friedman, "Axis of Appeasement," New York Times, 18 March 2004, sec. A.

¹⁸ Lizette Alvarez and Elaine Sciolino, "Spain Grapples With Notion That Terrorism Trumped Democracy," New York Times, 17 March 2004, sec. A.

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³⁴ See appendix.

³⁵ Ransom.

³⁶ "Foreign hostages in Iraq," CBC News On-Line, 22 June 2006, <www.cbc.ca> (23 March 2008).

³⁷ "Foreign Hostages in Afghanistan," Wikipedia, <www.wikipedia.com> (28 March 2008).

³⁸ See appendix.

³⁹ "Austrian hostage deadline expires," Al Jazeera On-Line, 07 April 2008, <english.aljazeera.net> (07 April 2008).

⁴⁰ These countries and their withdrawal dates are: Nicaragua (Feb. 2004); New Zealand (late Sep. 2004); Tonga (mid-Dec. 2004) Portugal (mid-Feb. 2005); The Netherlands (Mar. 2005); Hungary (Mar. 2005); Singapore (Mar. 2005); Norway (Oct. 2005); Slovakia (Jan 2007), derived from Non-US Forces.

⁴¹ Dr. Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall, "Alliances and American National Security," U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, October 2006, v-vii.

⁴² Author's knowledge. Official numbers and locations of personnel is classified.

⁴³ Testimony of John K. Noland, President, American Foreign Service Association, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, 23 January 2008, <www.afsa.org> (23 March 2008).

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APPENDIX A: ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Media analysis of the four leading newspapers suggests that criticism of the ROKG response was spread throughout the political spectrum, with only the far-left paper extolling the course of action and calling for ROK withdrawal from Iraq in addition to Afghanistan. The two moderate papers, *JoongAng Ilbo* and *Dong-A Ilbo* who only days before had been largely neutral on the subject, responded coldly and chastised the ROKG response to hostage situation as being, “[in] disregards [to] the norms which are universally in use in today's world,” adding that appeasement will, “increase the possibility of similar situations recurring.”¹ In a further break from the tacitly anti-U.S. policies of the Roh regime, *JoongAng Ilbo* added that even though the ROKG was considering appeasing the Taliban, a policy abhorred by the Bush regime, the U.S. continued its support to the process through human and imagery intelligence, and via diplomatic pressures on Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to mediate with the Taliban.² Needless to say, it is a rare occurrence, even within the media of traditional U.S. ally ROK, for any outlet to praise the actions of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

UKRAINE

The deployment of the Ukraine's 1,600 combat forces under the regime of President Leonid Kuchma was a political coup of sorts for the Bush administration. Not only did a non-NATO country provide the fourth largest--following the UK and Poland--number of troops following the invasion in late 2003, but the Ukraine's commitment sent a strong signal to neighboring Russia that the Ukraine was going to fall under the Western fold vice a return to its

Soviet roots. The initial deployment seemed to be without much fanfare, with support from all societal sectors, seemingly continuing up until 27 April when Kuchma issued a joint statement with Georgian PM Saakashvili that the two nations would stay in Iraq until the mission was finished. Apparently Kuchma had a change of heart, as one day later on 28 April he made a declaration that “Iraq requires a very serious rethink” following what was anecdotally called in the press “surrender” by Ukrainian forces at al-Kut and an increasing number of Ukrainian soldier fatalities in what Ukrainian parliamentarians thought would be a peacekeeping mission. This public wavering of commitment by the principle supporter of the Ukrainian deployment caused a swell of public opposition, only to be compounded by upcoming presidential elections.

What resulted was nothing less than a full turn-around in Ukrainian political attitudes on the war, as the presidential debates turned from whether or not to remain in Iraq to a game of one-ups-man-ship of which party would bring the troops home soonest. No sooner had opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko tied current Iraq policy to the pro-government candidate, Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych, than Yanukovych, attempting to garner Communist and Socialist votes from the Russian-majority eastern provinces, ordered his previously pro-deployment bloc to support a bill to withdraw Ukrainian troops.³ The U.S., believing its support for Yushchenko and his opposition party protests following the error ridden election would entice the in-bound President to block the bill backfired when Yushchenko followed through on his campaign promise to remove all Ukrainian forces from Iraq.⁴ Further encouraging Yushchenko’s decision was his warm reception by U.S. President Bush, who not only avoided the topic, focusing on the democratic values of the new president and his party, but reiterated U.S. support for Ukrainian accession into NATO.⁵ Seeing this as tacit approval for the withdrawal, Yushchenko continued

with the troop recall, even boasting about his decision on the one-year anniversary of the contested elections.

GEORGIA

The response from the former Soviet state of Georgia was nothing short of the opposite from that of Ukraine. Following the 9/11 attacks and the initiation of the war on terrorism, the U.S. pledged to support the Georgian government in its efforts to modernize and professionalize its army through the \$64 million USD Georgia Train and Equip (GTEP) program. Georgia was seen as Europe's closest front against al Qaeda-affiliated Chechyan forces operating in Georgia's Pankisi gorge area, an unacceptable situation for the West. This program, which has been found to have majority approval with the Georgian populace, has been repaid many times over with multiple deployment iterations--in which many of the soldiers were trained under the program--to Iraq.⁶ The tumultuous political revolution in November 2003, occurring in the midst of Georgia's first deployment, did not affect the arrival of forces, and debate on the deployment garnered scant attention by either side in the otherwise acrimonious political discourse. Four years later, with large-scale political protests in the streets of Tbilisi calling for President Saakashvili's resignation raging endlessly, Georgia not only continued its deployments but bucked conventional wisdom and more than doubled its forces to 2,000. Georgia also volunteered to take over from Danish forces the dangerous task of confronting Iranian-backed smugglers and militia on Iraq's border with that country. Fear of greater Russian influence on its borders, a desire to retake the breakaway republic of Abkhazia, by force if necessary, and NATO accession are likely driving factors behind these decisions, but nonetheless tiny Georgia remains a stalwart in its commitment in Iraq, and without any end in sight.⁷

EL SALVADOR

El Salvador is somewhat of a perplexing study. Ravaged by civil war in the 1980's and teetering on the edge of true democracy, they remain committed to the Iraq mission. That is not to say that popular support has always been high for the mission, as even from the beginning politicians had only lukewarm support for a combat mission, promising only to send troops for reconstruction and demining operations.⁸ Conventional wisdom would have thought that the Salvadoran 2004 presidential election campaign would have provided adequate top-cover for a domestically honorable withdrawal, however, the president-elect, who is of Palestinian decent, continued with the pro-U.S. policy at the very time the Dominican Republic and Honduras were leaving. Of note, as the *Plus Ultra* brigade was preparing to disband, then-U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell spoke directly to the Salvadoran people on the importance of the mission in Iraq and how proud Salvadorans should be for their soldiers, emphasizing that the Spanish withdrawal would not adversely affect their contingent.⁹ This small effort by a respected member of the U.S. cabinet may have played a significant role on the Salvadoran decision to stay.

Notes

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